

This research was conducted by the UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in collaboration with Value for Women and supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Open Society Foundations Soros Economic Development Fund global research programme ‘Transforming the Care Economy through Impact Investing’.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was enabled by collaboration with four digitally enabled care enterprises in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand. Thank you to the Chief Executive Officers and Founders of **LOVECARE, KIDDOCARE, ASEANA** and **KIIDU** for making this research possible, sharing their experiences, and their openness and trust to discuss the challenges and opportunities raised by this report. The authors would also like to extend their gratitude to all participants of the Asia-Pacific Care Economy Forum, hosted in Malaysia in June 2023, for their input and comments, and to ILO colleagues who shared resources and insights.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

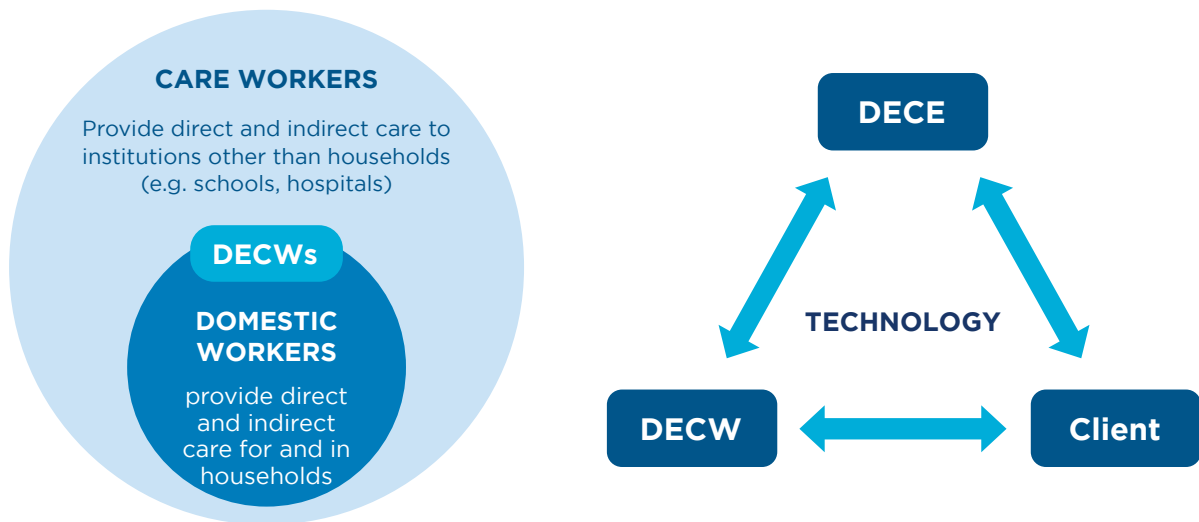
This publication examines emerging good practices of market-based models in the digitally enabled care economy in Southeast Asia and identifies pathways towards decent work for the predominantly female workforce.

The care economy entails the production and consumption of goods and services necessary for the physical, social, mental and emotional well-being of care-dependent groups. These include not only children, the elderly, the ill and people with disabilities, but also healthy, prime working-age adults. Caregiving services, both direct and indirect, can be provided for pay or without pay for the final use of family and household members.

Information and communication technology (ICT) has been used to transform all areas of

people's lives, including the delivery of care services. Increasingly, a variety of business models leveraging digitalization, such as online platforms and applications (apps), facilitate the matching of demand and supply in the care economy. This report defines this as the **“digitally enabled care economy”**, which refers to workers and enterprises who are in a work relationship with clients procuring services. Two elements characterize this work relationship: technology and the tripartite nature of the relationship between the enterprise, worker and client. The report refers to the organizations that work within the economy as “digitally enabled care enterprises” (DECEs) and the people who are providing the care services as “digitally enabled care workers” (DECWs).

The digitally enabled care economy and the tripartite relationship



In order to explore the opportunities and challenges emerging in the digitally enabled care economy, this report conducted a literature review, a policy landscape analysis of relevant international labour conventions and national legislation in select countries—Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand— and gathered new evidence through primary quantitative and

qualitative data collection with the involvement of four DECEs in Indonesia (**LOVECARE**), Malaysia (**KIDDOCARE**), Singapore (**ASEANA**) and Thailand (**KIIDU**). The selected DECEs vary in levels of technological development, from the least digital with recruitment services with embedded digital elements to the most digital with fully designed online labour platforms.

THE PARTICIPATING DIGITALLY ENABLED CARE ENTERPRISES

ASEANA

ASEANA is a nursing care agency in Singapore which recruits migrant, live-in DECWs, mostly from the Philippines.

KIIDU

KIIDU is an on-demand and long-term placement agency in Thailand which places live-in and live-out workers and engages both Thai nationals and migrant workers, who are predominantly from Myanmar.

LOVECARE

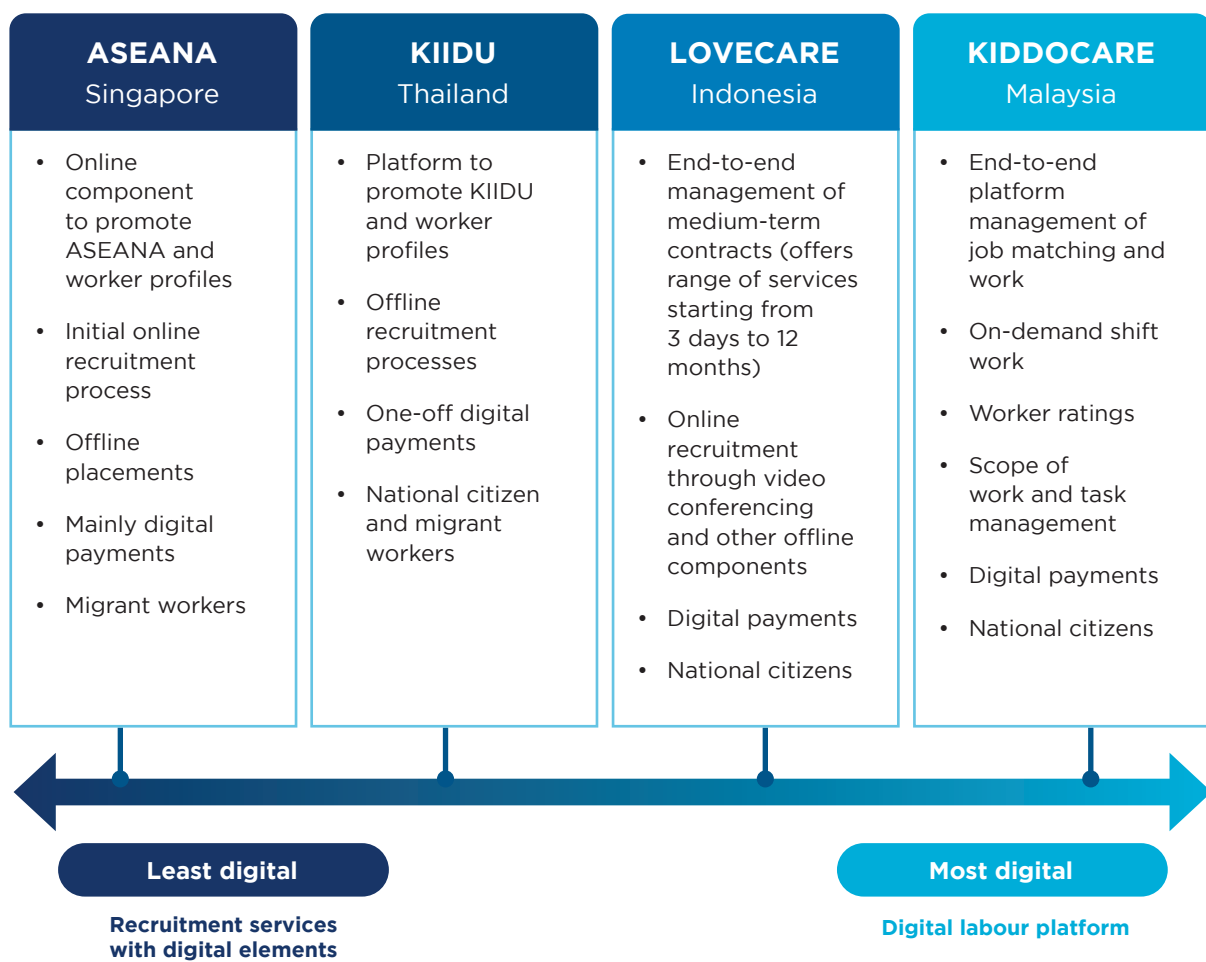
LOVECARE is a home care marketplace app that provides short, medium, and long-term caregiving services that is significantly digitalized. Only Indonesian citizens can use the platform and they provide live-in services.

KIDDOCARE

KIDDOCARE is an on-demand platform in Malaysia with an offline component for communicating with workers and clients. Only Malaysian permanent residents can use this platform to find clients. DECWs provide live-out services as they are only hired on a shift-by-shift basis.

The DECWs surveyed tend to be female, young, highly educated and live-out from their employer's home.

Continuum of technology development in DECEs



The digitally enabled care economy lacks gender data. To respond to these gaps, surveys were rolled out through the DECEs and information gathered from 595 DECWs in 4 countries and 120 customers in 2 countries. Qualitative methods were also used and involved 11 key informant interviews with the CEOs of the DECEs and key stakeholders and focus group discussions held in 3 countries with DECWs and customers.

While the composition of digitally enabled care work in this research is predominantly skewed towards the provision of direct care with 46 per cent of DECWs in childcare, 26 per cent in elderly

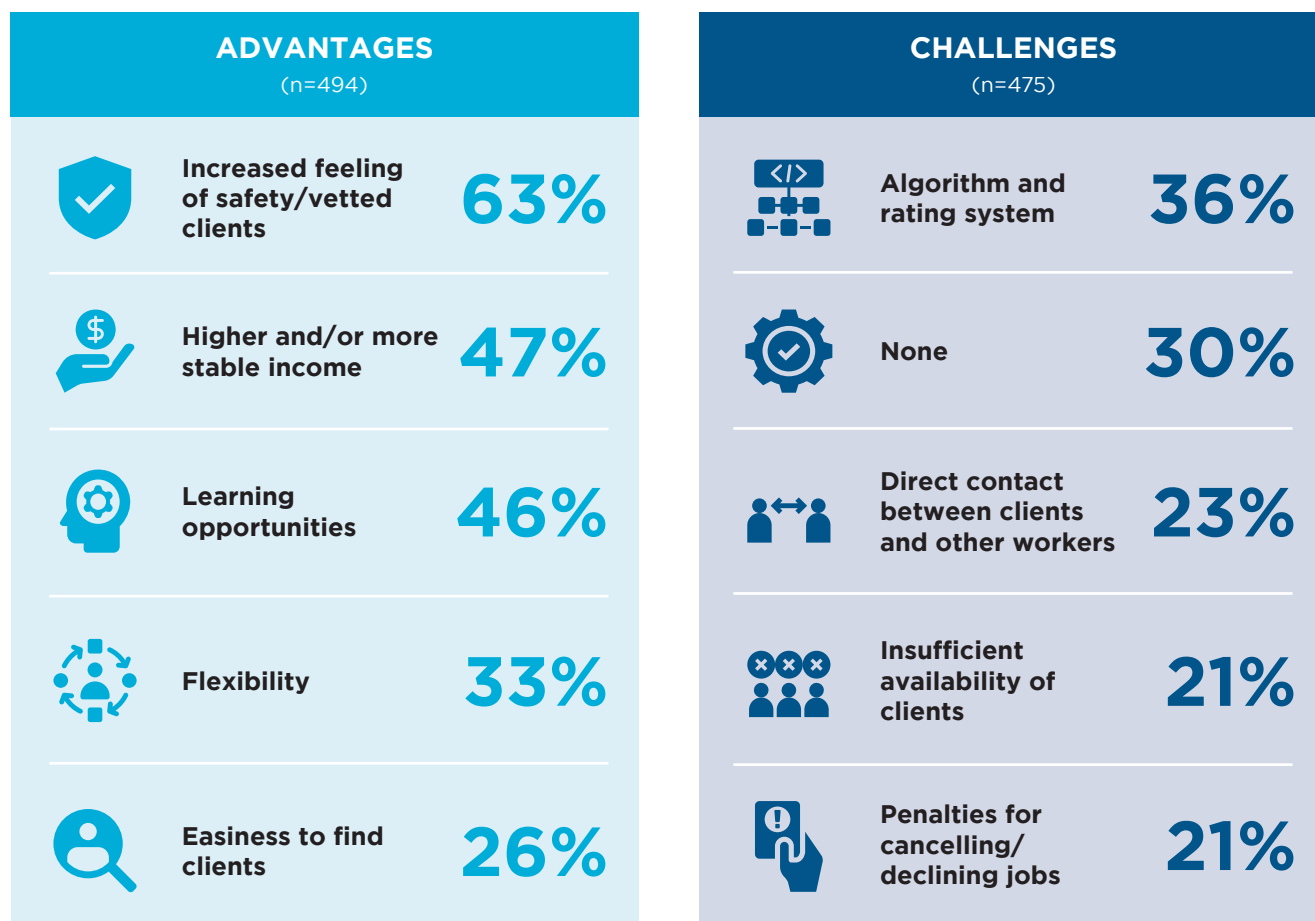
care, and 4 per cent in medical care, the sample allowed the creation of an overall **profile of care workers** operating in the digitally enabled care economy in Southeast Asia. It also informed an analysis of whether digitally enabled care work can facilitate pathways towards decent work in four domains: **i) flexibility and autonomy, ii) entitlements and protection, iii) income and iv) representation**. These domains were previously identified by UN Women as critical for assessing the benefits and challenges for women working in the platform economy, and are used as the **analytical framework** in this publication.

KEY FINDINGS

There are significant gaps in policy and legislation which prevent the systemic realization of decent work opportunities for care workers, including domestic workers, in the digitally enabled care economy in the select countries. Nevertheless, the

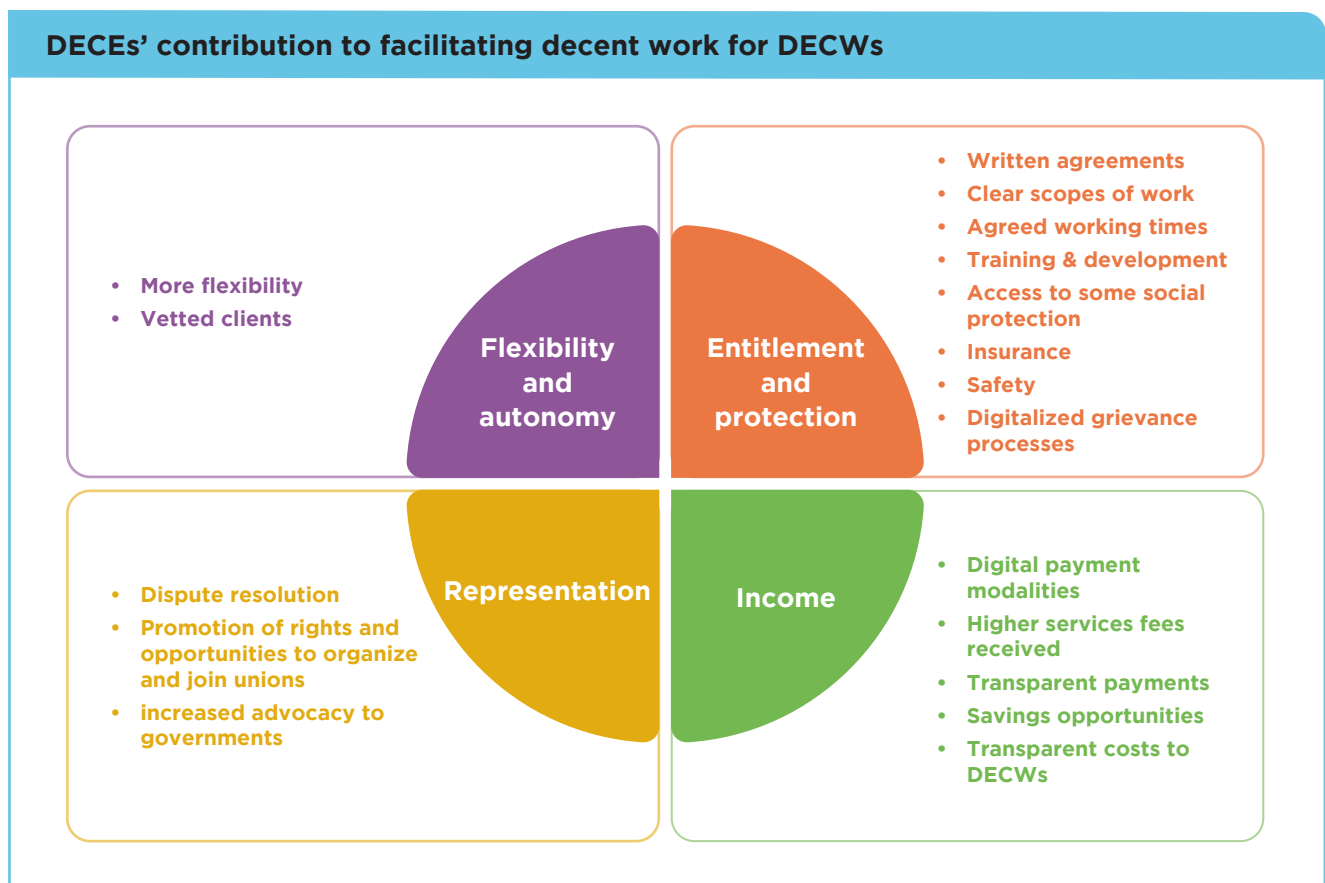
DECEs in this research demonstrated that they have the potential to facilitate pathways towards decent work for care workers, including domestic workers.

Top 5 perceived advantages and challenges identified by DECWs in working with DECEs



Pathways towards decent work emerged across the four domains. The type of work opportunities enabled by DECEs are characterized by **flexibility and autonomy** for a young and highly educated workforce while also enhancing safety through vetting of clients. The selected DECEs support DECWs’ **entitlements and protection** through written agreements that set a clear scope of work alongside agreed working hours and introduce grievance processes in the form of online complaint mechanisms. All of these factors are particularly important in the context of care work, which is characterized by decent work deficits, including in the non-digitized labour market in which domestic workers often operate. In addition, DECWs value the opportunities for training and skills development

offered by the DECEs; particular training and skills are often an entry requirement. Access by DECWs to social protection and health insurance is a sign of progress in some cases, but coverage is still limited due to the absence of legal frameworks on decent work for care workers, including domestic workers, in select countries. In the area of **income**, most DECWs received digital payments, which can improve their financial autonomy, and thus strengthen women’s economic empowerment through increased transparency around fees and payment rules and increasing their options for savings. Finally, DECEs can support DECWs’ representation by helping resolve disputes and facilitate increased advocacy to governments.



The following key findings emphasize timely opportunities for policy reforms to establish a rights-based framework for care workers, including domestic workers, and help identify targeted actions for stakeholders in the care

ecosystem to accelerate progress towards the realization of decent work and women’s economic empowerment. It also encourages DECEs and DECWs to be engaged in this process.

FINDING 1

A conceptual framework, definitions and classifications for the digitally enabled care economy are lacking, leading to gender data gaps in official statistics. There are also significant knowledge gaps in research, which hamper understanding of working conditions in the digitally enabled care economy.



Currently, there is a lack of an internationally agreed and comprehensive framework on the care economy and its constituent elements, including the digitally enabled care economy and its actors. This void translates into measurement and analytical challenges, including knowledge gaps in research and the lack of availability of official statistics. The lack of gender data on a highly feminized sector, such as the care economy, limits evidence-informed decision making. Innovative thinking is needed to overcome definitional constraints

and knowledge gaps on the digitally enabled care economy. This research employed the newly coined terminology “digitally enabled care workers” (DECWs) and “digitally enabled care enterprises” (DECEs) to refer to workers and enterprises who are in a work relationship with clients of care services, enabled through digital means. This definition has been found to be important in filling definitional gaps in a multifaceted and rapidly evolving care economy.

FINDING 2

The care economy is growing, with a variety of business models operating in Southeast Asia that leverage digitalization for matching care demand and supply. These models attract young, educated, skilled women with previous work experience in the care sector.



With a growing demand for care services, new care delivery models that leverage digitalization are emerging in Southeast Asia and globally. These include childcare, elderly care and care for people with disability, and include female entrepreneurs who are establishing DECEs, providing marketplaces and recruitment services for care workers, including domestic workers. DECE business models offer different services, and are not uniform. They range from recruitment agencies complementing offline work with online components to digital labour platforms offering on-demand caregiving services. In some cases, DECEs engage live-in migrant care workers; in others, they target only permanent residents in their country of operation. DECEs are rapidly adapting to a higher demand for services as shown in their business growth in

the last three years. DECEs are also widening their portfolio with business-to-business (B2B) solutions, such as employer-supported care, which is an important area for future research.

The profile of DECWs derived from research challenges the notion that workers in the care economy are low skilled and low value. In this study, DECWs are relatively young, and mostly highly educated women. They are experienced, having previously worked in the care sector. This suggests they may have switched from the non-digital to the digitally enabled care sector. A few DECWs in this study saw their digitally enabled work as temporary but most see it as an opportunity for skills development and a future career path.

FINDING 3

In a highly informal care economy, digitally enabled care enterprises can take steps to accelerate progress for digitally enabled care workers towards decent work and women's economic empowerment. DECEs have established pathways to decent work that are particularly important in contexts where care workers, including domestic workers, have historically suffered from workplace vulnerabilities and severe decent work deficits.



Regulations for the digitally enabled care economy can help accelerate actions to fill care delivery gaps in Southeast Asia, while also enhancing transparency in the care economy, which is highly informal. However, in Southeast Asia, there is a lack of legal protection for care workers, including domestic workers. In the absence of regulations, DECEs are playing a role in moving DECWs closer to decent work.

More specifically, DECEs provide work opportunities to employees and independent workers, with flexible working arrangements that are highly valued by the DECWs themselves. The tripartite and digitally enabled relationship also increases the degree of safety at work, as perceived by both workers and clients. For this, DECEs' added value lies in vetting clients and workers, setting high entry requirements, introducing opportunities for skills development, and grievance mechanisms, including maintaining an offline component for direct communication. More importantly, DECEs use written or oral agreements that clarify the scope of work, working hours, duration of services, payment modalities and rules of engagement. While DECEs' delivery of digital payments increases transparency and offers DECWs an option for savings, they also have positive spillover effects on women's economic empowerment

by increasing women's agency and control over assets. Together, these findings indicate that select DECEs are facilitating pathways towards decent work¹ that are particularly important in contexts where care workers, including domestic workers, have historically had a severe deficit of decent work opportunities.

While DECEs can be a useful model and contribute towards a more resilient care economy, there are limitations to the degree to which DECEs can accelerate progress towards decent work and more specifically, towards full social protection coverage for DECWs. While this report describes attempts at advocating for and extending social protection to digitally enabled care workers, within the context in which most DECEs operate where regulations are severely lacking, the full protection and realization of workers' rights is not ensured. Regulations that apply to DECEs, recognizing their specific characteristics and different business models, are lacking. The rapid pace of market development must be matched by an equally responsive regulatory environment that can strengthen decent work outcomes for DECWs, especially in the area of social protection. Practical mechanisms to enforce these regulations and hold actors accountable are also essential to ensure the steady transition of DECWs into decent work.

¹ This was observed from the DECEs analysed, yet research with a broader range of firms is needed to ascertain if this is because of a sample bias (e.g. being Women's Empowerment Principles signatories, having a female founder).

FINDING 4

The lack of ratification of International Labour Standards limits the extent of protection of domestic workers, including DECWs, by national labour laws. They are often excluded from social protection policies regardless of whether they contribute to the digitally enabled or non-digital care economy. There are specific challenges for workers operating at the intersection of the care economy and the digital economy but DECWs are not yet recognized as a distinct legal category in the countries analysed.



Legislation that applies to DECEs and DECWs is not fit for purpose. The emergence of DECEs has outpaced the development of adequate regulatory and legal frameworks for ensuring decent work for DECWs. No current international convention or national law fully captures the regulatory needs of digitally enabled care workers. DECWs are subject to laws on both domestic work and digital platform work, yet they fall through the cracks of both international labour standards and national policies, because regulators often treat domestic workers and platform workers separately and as mutually exclusive cohorts of workers. The implication for DECWs is that they can be protected by one regulatory development and excluded from another.

Moreover, when legislation is amended or drafted to adapt to the growth in digital platforms, it tends to be designed around male-dominated sectors, such as driving and delivery services, and does not always account

for the needs of other sectors such as care. In the countries considered for this report, there is no evidence of national legislation that addresses the intersection of the care economy and the digital economy. Ratification of international conventions is lagging. DECWs do not yet have a distinct legal classification that can facilitate their proper regulation, while DECEs' business registrations in ICT are exempt from regulations pertaining to care centres. This is systemic across countries and is a broader challenge across sectors in the digital economy. There remain opportunities to improve laws and policies across all four pillars as per ILO language of decent work. At the same time, the research found that enterprises operating at the intersection of the care economy and the digital economy are calling for regulation to ensure the quality, affordability and accessibility of care. Thus, DECEs can play an important role in advocating and highlighting the crucial issues at this intersection.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these key findings, the following 12 recommendations are proposed as ways forward for enabling the realization of decent work and

women's economic empowerment in the digitally enabled care economy embracing a multi-stakeholder approach.

FOR GOVERNMENTS AND POLICYMAKERS

1. Ratify relevant international labour standards—especially Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), extend coverage provided by existing national policies and regulations to include domestic workers, and introduce gender-responsive policymaking.
2. Improve government policies and practices for migrant workers in the digitally enabled care economy, for example, by removing exclusionary clauses from existing industrial relations legislation, including migrant DECWs in the policymaking process and improving their digital literacy.
3. Incentivize DECEs to improve conditions for DECWs as well as to encourage businesses to provide employer-supported care, with DECEs as an important delivery mechanism.
4. Formalize skill standards and recognition and develop skills training in collaboration with DECEs to professionalize the sector.
5. Strengthen DECEs' advocacy efforts by facilitating partnerships and collaboration across sectors.

FOR ENTERPRISES

6. Digitize business processes while maintaining an offline connection to workers to ensure in-person communication with workers and clients when needed.
7. Establish more transparent business processes for DECWs.
8. Engage with government agencies to support the delivery of policies, programmes and initiatives that improve decent work for women in the digitally enabled care economy.

FOR OTHER ECOSYSTEM ACTORS

9. Strengthen decent work in the digitally enabled care economy by collaborating with diverse ecosystem players and subject matter experts.
10. Promote investment in women-owned and/or women-benefiting digitally enabled care enterprises to create decent jobs, especially for women workers.
11. Set up systems that ensure that customers meet requirements for the provision of decent work.

FOR INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEMS

12. Develop and adopt internationally agreed statistical standards on the care economy and its constituent parts, including the digitally enabled care economy.
13. Invest in the production of sex-disaggregated care data and research to make women's work in the digital care economy visible.